

COLOMBIA

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The enigma of the new Constitution to be given to the country still hangs over the heads of the Colombians. The Constitutional Assembly, supposedly to meet May 15 after an initial postponement, was delayed again by presidential decree on May 4 until June 15. This action is closely related to the internal strife within the Conservative Party, but the official reason given was the "physical" impossibility of publishing the government project on time. Thus at the end of May, two weeks before the meeting of the Assembly, the country ignores the articles to be adopted. This situation is symptomatic of the total disregard for public opinion. To date the only disclosures of the intended reform were those made by Minister of Government, Luis Ignacio Andrade, on May 6 in a public letter to the departmental authorities. These so-called "bases" of the reform which were to be made public throughout the country, in the words of the Minister, "for the analysis and acceptance of all the governed" have not permitted authoritative discussion because they are vague statements, the extent of which can only fully be judged by the actual text of the project. The Minister's disclosure has caused alarm not only among the liberals but among many conservatives who do not approve of the mixture of imported ideas presented under the heading of "Christian Democracy". The salient points are: political parties will be permitted only if they conform to the norms of "Christian Democracy" that is, the doctrines of the present Government; the previous constitutional norm of freedom of worship is to be replaced by the simple tolerance of any cult different from Roman Catholicism; freedom of education will be practically destroyed; the press will become a "public utility" (servicio público), placed under the permanent control of the government, thus eliminating freedom of press which has already been suspended in Colombia for the

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past four years; radio and television are to be state controlled; secret societies will be proscribed (Gómez' afternoon paper, the Diario Gráfico, explained that this will be applied not only to the Masons, but also to the Rotarians and Lions); the Senate is to become a pseudo-corporativistic body in the formation of which the government will have a decisive influence; universal suffrage will be restricted to the vote of legally married heads of families for the election of municipal councils and departmental assemblies. These bodies, long cherished because of principles of sectional administrative autonomy, will be placed under the domination of Governors and Mayors, directly appointed representatives of the Central Executive.

This project was prepared by Titular President Laureano Gómez and Minister Andrade and does not follow all the recommendations of the Constitutional Committee (H.A.R., V:6) made public last year. The ideology of the reform has been provided by President Gómez and its philosophy can be better appreciated from his own explanations, the last of which was an article entitled "Constitutional Errors" (Errores Constitucionales) which was prominently displayed in El Siglo of May 21. President Gómez stated: "Universal suffrage, inorganic and generalized in all social activities to decide the direction of the State contradicts the nature of society itself. The management of the state is by antonomasia a product of intelligence. An elementary observation shows that intelligence is not equally distributed among the members of the human species. In this respect society resembles a pyramid, the vertex of which is occupied by a Genius, if he exists at all in a given country, or by an individual of most outstanding position because of his intellectual condition. Underneath is found those which having less capacities are more numerous.

There follows in this manner a kind of stratification of social layers, numerous in inverse proportion to the degree of intelligence, until at the base is the lower layer reached, the most ample and numerous, that which supports the whole pyramid and is composed of the obscure and inept multitude (vulgo) where rationality barely appears to differentiate human beings from beasts."

Neither Gómez' article nor the bases made public by Andrade refer to the possibility of the next president's being elected by the Constitutional Assembly, (H.A.R., VI:4) a move which would by-pass Ospina's rights and popular support. Such a possibility seems now more certain. Ex-President Ospina stated in mimeographed leaflets handed out clandestinely that he has been subjected to the strictest censorship; the use of mails and wire services are permitted him only for personal and business matters; mention of his name by press or radio and the printing of his pictures has been forbidden. A banquet for Acting-President Urdaneta, given in the name of the armed forces and offered by Lieutenant General Rojas Pinilla, was interpreted in some quarters as an insinuation to Urdaneta from an Ospina-favorable army to break away from Gómez' hold, and in other quarters, as a new proof of the unconditional allegiance of the army to the Executive. The only positive conclusion to be drawn is that the army spokesman took an openly partisan stand when he expressed the army's concern over the internal strife of the Conservative Party. The same day an extraordinary decree created two new ranks: Brigadier General and Major General, and in the navy, the ranks of Admiral and Vice-Admiral.

Whatever the real implications of the banquet may have been, the following week the President appointed a new and very strong Cabinet, almost totally composed of staunch pre-Gómez men. The reorganization of

the Cabinet had been expected as necessary before the meeting of the Constitutional Assembly to which seven Ministers are delegates. Andrade, who is believed to be the heir apparent announced that he would attend the Assembly to defend the official project, and El Siglo promptly stated that he was to preside over the Assembly, ~~and~~ ^{and} in the meantime he has been appointed Ambassador Extraordinary to ^{The Coronation of} Queen Elizabeth II. To replace him as Minister of Government Rafael Azuero, a physician from Andrade's home town and his personal follower, was appointed. To reciprocate Azuero, a member of the Conservative National Directorate since 1951, upon assuming the Cabinet post, appointed Andrade as his proxy in that body. Ministers José Gabriel de la Vega, José María Bernal, Manuel Mosquera Garcés and Alejandro Jiménez Arango, Ospina sympathizers, were replaced. Jorge Leyva, Minister of Public Works since 1950 and another possible presidential successor remained in the same post. Ruthless, former Governor of Norte de Santander and ex-Ambassador to Portugal, Lucio Fabón Núñez, was promoted from the Ministry of Education to that of War. A noteworthy appointment was that of Guillermo León Valencia, former Ambassador to Spain, to be Minister of Foreign Relations. Valencia, who was appointed to both the official and Alzatista Directorates in 1951, did not enter either but carefully avoided any entanglements. He has been considered a possible compromise candidate to solve the Gómez-Ospina feud and his appointment appears to be a bid by the Government to gain his support.

Ospina's friends have responded ~~have responded~~ to Government moves in several ways. They plan to contest the Government proposals in the Constitutional Assembly. In addition former Minister of Justice, de la Vega, and elder statesman Francisco de P. Pérez, principal members of the Conservative National Directorate, whose places had been up to now occupied by alternates, decided to take part in the Directorate. Joaquín Estrada Monsalve, President of the Directorate and Editor of El Siglo, refused

to admit them until the return of Andrade would insure a majority of Government members.

For a short time during the past month this political controversy was overshadowed by the dispute with Venezuela over the Grandcolombian Merchant Fleet. The conflict originated when the Board of Directors approved a motion taking away the extra-statutory powers which it had formerly granted to the Chairman of the Board with regard to approval of appointments. The Chairmanship at present is filled by José Llovera Méz of Venezuela. This determination occasioned a strong protest by the Venezuelan Directors and finally their return to Caracas. The matter was left in the hands of the Governments of the three member countries. It was decided that the contested motion was to be revoked as a settlement. The incident produced very strong attacks against Colombia by some Venezuelan papers. The Colombian attitude was one of great calm; El Tiempo, in an editorial of May 3, recalled the great financial achievements attained by the enterprise, but pointed out that it was more than a business venture; it was the fruit of much needed international cooperation and understanding. Colombians understood that the attacks were in part fostered by maritime interests in Venezuela and in most part were the result of political expediency. The Venezuelan Government of Colonel Pérez Jiménez which found in the 1952 election that it lacked popular support hoped to capitalize politically by channeling against Colombia the strong nationalistic sentiment which had been sown by the opposition UNO against the oil companies and had gained them such strong support. That no really basic issues were involved can be seen by the fact that one of the most strongly voiced demand was for a change in the name of the Company, since it was claimed that Colombia was unduly ^{in prestige} profiting from it. Some of the extremists went as far as proposing the name "Coleven" (Colombia-Ecuador-Venezuela), stating that Gran Colombia had never existed.

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The attached material, while overt, known, and somewhat outdated, is forwarded as of possible interest as a reflection of Colombian Liberal thinking. It was prepared for a Latin American publication but will not be used, at least in this form, because of recent developments in Colombia.